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THE GEOGRAPHERS' PERSPECTIVE
AMERICAN HERITAGE LANDSCAPES

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PREFACE

The National Park Service recently celebrated its 75th year as an organization committed to the preservation and enjoyment of the nation's outstanding resources. The 75th Anniversary Symposium, held October 7-10, 1991, was the culmination of a year-long celebration and assessment of the future of the national park system. One of the most important recommendations to come out of the symposium was to explore the potential for establishing an *American heritage landscape system*. The National Park Service is reaching out to all levels of government, the academic community, and the public to receive their ideas about such a system. This is the first in a series of reports on those ideas.



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The National Park Service is grateful to the following individuals for sharing their time and energy to discuss this topic of growing national interest:

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AMERICAN HERITAGE LANDSCAPES:

THE GEOGRAPHERS' PERSPECTIVE

The Heritage Landscape Workshop held on January 6-8, 1992, convened six highly distinguished geographers and an equal number of representatives from the National Park Service to discuss the concept of American heritage landscapes. The National Park Service was particularly interested in hearing the geographers' perspective on

what constitutes a heritage landscape

how they might be identified, evaluated, and possibly ranked

how they might be protected from degradation of their heritage values

The group provided many valuable insights that will be incorporated into the concept paper on heritage landscapes currently in preparation. The major findings of the workshop are summarized in this report.

AMERICAN HERITAGE LANDSCAPES:

THE CONCEPT

Americans are discovering America. Whereas in the past we have tended to talk about our heritage in terms of isolated heroes, heroic events, and natural wonders, today we are becoming increasingly interested in something larger—in the intricacies of the American landscape, where the natural and the cultural, both the humble and the grandiose, fuse together in distinctive regional patterns and where layers accumulating over successive generations eventually impart a deep and reflective patina to the scene. The richest of these landscapes, perhaps more than any of our other national symbols, represent the essence of the American experience.

The recent public interest in identifying and protecting these heritage landscapes is resulting in a landslide of proposals for adding new units to the national park system. However, because of the nature of these landscapes—primarily because they are relatively large cross sections of America where people continue to live and work—they are not well suited to management as traditional national parks. To recognize and facilitate the appropriate management of these highly significant areas, the National Park Service is considering the potential for establishing a national system of American heritage landscapes.

The concept of heritage landscapes is evolving as the national dialogue about these areas expands. When asked what a heritage landscape is, the geographers offered the following definitions.

All heritage landscapes are by their nature "regional," and many of them can be considered of "national significance." Portions of the Palouse..., Bluegrass [area]..., and Amish [country], for example, are of significance to all Americans as part of their national heritage.

Michael Conzen

All NPS areas should be significant to telling the nation's story. However, regional...values may drive that designation. A Cajun area might inform the national story of ethnicity.

John Jakle

Historically the American experience is manifest in regional landscapes. When you overlay a set of cultures (coming from different directions, e.g., Hispanic and Anglo) with a distinct set of environments, the result will be a regionalization of experience. The set of landscapes typical of the South will be quite different from those of the Southwest or New England.

J. L. Sell

The revolutionary and valuable idea behind heritage areas is thinking in terms of whole/complex identities.

Bonnie Loyd

[Heritage landscapes place] emphasis on daily life—the ordinary, mundane, characteristic, representative, commonplace, familiar, traditional....Heritage landscapes are the first real opportunity to highlight everyday life.

Bonnie Loyd

- **Heritage landscapes are regionally distinctive places of national significance:** Basically, they are geographic regions (landscapes) whose features symbolize valued traditional lifeways (heritage). Although they are distinctly regional in character—being derived from a particular set of cultural traditions overlaid onto a particular landform—what they represent and illustrate is nationally important as part of the American experience.

Thus, the participants in the seminar disagreed with the idea, expressed by others, that a major difference between heritage landscapes and traditional national parks is that heritage landscapes are less than nationally significant. This group unanimously believed that heritage landscapes, like parks, are nationally significant, but that they differ from traditional national parks in their scope, complexity, and management.

- **Heritage landscapes are multidimensional representations of everyday life:** Like all cultural landscapes (of which they are a highly valued subset), heritage landscapes are products of an interplay between natural and cultural forces: geologic, biologic, social, economic, political, aesthetic, and spiritual. The representation of all these factors on a regional scale is one of the things that distinguishes heritage landscapes from traditional national parks. (Traditional parks tend to be more tightly focused on a particular exceptional factor represented by a comparatively small site.)

Because of their multidimensional character and broad scope, heritage landscapes represent the lifestyles of a wide cross section of people. They may include some exceptional elements, but they are predominantly ordinary.

These landscapes are not only rural. In practice, no value judgments should be placed on the rural and/or urban character.

Tom Harvey

Heritage areas are lived in or "living" landscapes—not fossilized as museums.

John Jakle

Heritage landscapes are usually characterized by the presence of viable cultural and economic activities.

Ervin Zube

Places are valued because they have a significant functional or symbolic relationship with the people who use them. That place-person relationship is at the core of a heritage landscape. If the functional relationship or meaning of a landscape [element] is...no longer part of a culture's way of life it will...not survive as a working element of the landscape.

J. L. Sell

Heritage landscapes are valued by those who live and work in them.

Ervin Zube

Heritage landscapes represent urban as well as rural life. Although people often equate a "landscape" with natural scenery, in this context, landscapes can be any geographic region—urban or rural.

- **Heritage landscapes are living, evolving landscapes.** People's lifeways—remembered and ongoing—impart meaning to the material features of a heritage landscape. Because people continue to live and work in these landscapes, the material features cannot be frozen in time. They continue to evolve as the local residents adapt to the exigencies of modern life. The layering of each generation's cultural adaptations provides a valuable perspective on the changing American experience.
- **Heritage landscapes are valued and maintained by the people living and working there.** Local residents are the only ones who can decide which aspects of their past are important enough to perpetuate as part of their future. Consequently, the identification and preservation of heritage landscapes is inherently a grassroots, bottom-up process driven by local communities with guidance and assistance from technical experts. Because they are multidimensional, living landscapes, heritage landscapes are most appropriately owned and managed by the people who live there, not by the government.

AMERICAN HERITAGE LANDSCAPES:

THE PROCESS

American heritage landscapes are envisioned as federally designated and assisted areas that remain under local ownership and management. The American heritage landscape system could be established with federal funding that would underwrite technical planning and start-up assistance for a 10-year period, then partial ongoing financial support to the designated areas. The program would be administered primarily through the states, who would inventory and nominate potential heritage landscapes and coordinate federal, state, and local financial and technical assistance to designated areas.

The process of identifying and designating heritage landscapes would involve (1) the establishment of national themes and identification of landscapes representative of those themes and (2) an evaluation and prioritization of landscapes based on a combination of academic and political considerations.

IDENTIFYING THEMES AND REPRESENTATIVE LANDSCAPES

The identification of themes and representative landscapes would be an incremental process driven partly by the development of a conceptual thematic outline and partly by the identification and integration of important landscapes. Some important landscapes may not be apparent to lay persons. The descriptive, scholarly side of the process is needed to ensure that regions are interpreted correctly and all dimensions are included.

[Heritage landscapes] are large areas that represent and illustrate important themes in American history....Broad categories of themes ...might include agricultural, industrial, transportation, scenic, recreational, community, resource management, exploitationInventories will require multidisciplinary teams with specific disciplines required for specific landscapes. For example an agricultural landscape inventory should probably include...an agricultural economist and a specialist in the commodities.

Ervin Zube

Identify potential heritage areas according to historical themes (heritage themes)....Significance vis-a-vis intersection of historical (heritage) themes....

John Jakle

A first cut inventory should include some obvious themes: agricultural, mining, industrial, urban, suburban, settlement?, transportation. It should also be able to pick up other significant landscape themes that may not be so evident.

J. L. Sell

Heritage landscapes can be evaluated and analyzed with multidisciplinary commissions charged with assessing the identity as a whole, rather than seeing the region as simply a bundle of separate themes, such as labor history, religion, and technological history....We should resist the temptation to make lists of "ingredients."

Bonnie Loyd

Base [inventories] on the existing literature: descriptive of the elements of landscape (their origins and diffusion over time and space); descriptive of how these elements combine as landscape complexes in the present day.

John Jakle

The regionalization process is used to carve the territory up into logical, thematic zones; it is not simply a political division of territory. The regions, themes, and histories will differ from place to place, but should be seen as more-or-less of equivalent historic/preservation value (e.g., Great Plains agricultural landscape, the plantation South, 20th-century California agriculture are all important.

Tom Harvey

Thematic Outlines

The group seemed to approach the basis for thematic surveys from two different directions:

(1) From a historical theme orientation, that is, looking first for outstanding representations of national historical themes (For example, the Dakotas might be identified as a significant regional representation of the historical development of American agriculture.)

(2) From a geographical region orientation, that is, looking first for the best representation of a distinctive cultural region, which implies from the outset a synthesis of historical, natural, and scenic themes (For example, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, might be identified as a significant multidimensional cultural landscape characterized by traditional land uses, ecosystems, visual characteristics, and social traditions). From this point of view the landscape would be considered significant because it richly represented a piece of the fabric of America, not because it represented a significant contribution to the development of American agriculture or any other theme.

Most existing [inventorying procedures] focus on limited categories of artifacts, and need integrating into a more comprehensive methodology suitable for the complexity of whole cultural landscapes.

Michael Conzen

Multiplicity of cultural-historical themes.

Michael Conzen

A panel of cultural geographers ...could probably pick out a few outstanding examples in each region, e.g. the California Mother Lode, the San Pedro Valley (11,000 years of human occupation), northern New Mexico (strong Native American/Hispanic landscape, perhaps the Four Corners area (present and past Native American civilization) for the Southwest.

J. L. Sell

The two approaches would not be mutually exclusive: thematic and regional surveys could be overlaid to help identify particularly rich cultural-geographic regions representing a number of national historic themes.

Or perhaps Michael Conzen's term "cultural-historical" themes implies a blending of historic and cultural-geographic theme structures. The group did not discuss whether the term "historical themes" implies the themes currently used to categorize national historic landmarks, or whether we need a new set of themes more appropriate to heritage landscapes.

Landscape Surveys

It was suggested that professional geographers could develop a thematic outline and demarcate nationally significant cultural regions for heritage landscape purposes. A good starting place might be the regional historical maps produced by the National Geographic Society, which divide the United States into 13 major regions. A more in-depth survey would perhaps identify 250-300 valued landscapes.

Regardless of how they are identified, heritage landscapes should be considered discrete geographic areas: That is, they should be mappable, and their boundaries should not overlap. Although in theory the interrelationships among cultural regions are important to the story of American history, in practice overlapping heritage landscapes would be an administrative nightmare.

Survey localities asking questions concerning the commonplace/normative/average and the unique/special/extraordinary.

John Jakle

The state process is political/administrative and will not always result in identification of regional/national significance. Many key landscapes will be within state borders, but some will overlap state boundaries because major regions do not coincide with the states. The important things to recognize, at the first stage of identification and assessment, are the regionally important landscapes....Criteria for landscapes could be academic, mostly top-down; what best represents significant historical-geographical development....This would not preclude identification at the state level.

Tom Harvey

Significance of major themes in national and regional development.

Michael Conzen

A unique example of the theme....Representativeness of the theme or themes....Evaluation can best be accomplished by panels of "experts" making comparative judgments among landscapes within a given theme or subtheme.

Ervin Zube

Surveys could be conducted on a state or national level. An advantage of conducting a survey on a national level would be the opportunity to identify landscape units that cut across state boundaries.

Advantages of state-conducted surveys would be the efficiency of an existing framework and the likelihood of more in-depth coverage, assuming the states could be given adequate technical support to ensure necessary professional expertise. It was noted that cultural resource surveys tend to be heavily weighted toward exceptional architecture, and that to be effective, the surveys should be conducted by interdisciplinary teams including cultural geographers and cultural historians as well as architectural historians. State-conducted surveys could be consolidated on the national level within a framework of national themes.

EVALUATING AND PRIORITIZING LANDSCAPES

The following criteria could be used to evaluate and prioritize heritage landscapes. They are presented in no particular order.

- **Multiplicity of national historical themes:** *The number of national historical themes represented by the landscape.*

Combination/interaction/synthesis/complex/composition/integration of resources, economic activity, ethnicity, social history, scenery, and others. The identity/whole is more significant than a mere accumulation of the parts. Synthesis/interaction.

Bonnie Loyd

We should be interested in representational landscapes, but a representative landscape need not be a common one. How do the selected landscapes reflect the "best" of a representative environment?

Tom Harvey

We should seek landscapes characteristic of a type of American experience. The unique or special places are more for parks and historic sites. Heritage landscapes should be manifestations of typical American activities in a place over time.

J. L. Sell

We must consider how to balance the unique with the representative to ensure that the unique do not dominate....The opportunity [to highlight everyday life] may be overlooked if "unique" landscapes grab the attention.

Bonnie Loyd

Does the place reflect change over time?....Is there an ongoing, distinctive culture group living and working in the area?....Do the landscape elements have a reasonable chance of survival without major intervention?

Tom Harvey

The chronological depth of the major themes (some weighting toward earliest/oldest is defensible because it is likely to be the scarcest).

Michael Conzen

Evidence of the historical evolution of the cultural transformation of the landscape.

Ervin Zube

- **Multidimensional richness:** *The degree to which the landscape represents all the dimensions of a cultural region—its geographical complexity and diversity. A heritage landscape should be large enough to encompass multiple dimensions. It should represent the natural land base as well as people's cultural adaptations, features of social and aesthetic as well as political and economic significance, the communities of the common people as well as the homes of the powerful and wealthy.*

Related to this criterion, the question of representative vs. unusual or unique was discussed at some length. It was agreed that heritage landscapes should be representative—that that is, in fact, one of the things that distinguish them from national historic landmarks and parks. And yet the richest of these representative landscapes will be unique in their diversity. Dealing with whole landscapes, there is less conflict between representative and unique than when dealing with individual sites. Nevertheless, care should be taken to avoid giving undue consideration to unique features, recognizing that it is easier to get public attention for something that is outstanding than for something representative.

- **Chronological depth:** *The degree to which evidence of each succeeding decade is discernible and can be interpreted. Although "heritage" implies history and something from the past, the most desirable state of a heritage landscape would not be the mummification of a single historical period, but rather a layering of successive periods showing the evolution of people's cultural adaptations over time. The contrast of the new with the old is important. However, the new should not be allowed to overwhelm those things from the past that are worth saving.*

A sense of cohesiveness—the landscape "hangs together."

Ervin Zube

Seek landscapes that carry high levels of authenticity (not self-parodying), high levels of integrity, and high aesthetic qualities.

John Jakle

Is there a sufficient amount of evidence of the major themes?...

Tom Harvey

The spatial coherence of landscape features illustrating the relevant historical themes....The size of the area and clarity of its margins.

Michael Conzen

If the local populace and local government authorities are not leaders in the designation and planning process, a heritage landscape will not be allowed to survive or to evolve in such a way that the landscape maintains continuity with the past.

J. L. Sell

Do the living-in working-in groups want to preserve a lifestyle?...With change allowed is there a realistic hope that the landscape can be preserved for, say, a 20-year period?

Tom Harvey

Level of support of the local population.

Ervin Zube

Is it the last, or nearly so, of its type?...Is it currently endangered?

Tom Harvey

- **Visual integrity.** *The degree to which all the dimensions of the landscape are represented by material features, and the integrity and visual excitement of those features.*

- **Local commitment:** *The degree to which local communities are committed and prepared to conserve heritage values.*

- **Scarcity/threat:** *The degree to which timely action would make a difference in the conservation of heritage resources. It was noted that an imminent threat of severe degradation might lower, rather than raise, an area's priority because the values would probably be lost before effective action could be taken.*

Living landscapes should be allowed to live and grow....but the change that occurs should be controlled enough to allow continuity with the landscape layers of significance.

J. L. Sell

Threats to heritage landscapes comprise only a subset of changes that inevitably occur in them as part of a "natural" process. Changes are threatening only if they will greatly reduce or eliminate the key material features (or their spatial arrangement) which contribute vitally to the proper interpretation of the key historical themes.

Michael Conzen

PROTECTING THE LANDSCAPES

Heritage landscapes are expected to change. The goal in designating them is not to freeze them in time, but to help guide change in ways that perpetuate the heritage values important to the people who live there.

Local residents may need help in identifying the elements that give their landscape its cultural identity. They may be used to focusing on the "mansion on the hill" rather than on the elements within their own neighborhoods and farmsteads that give the landscape its character. Heritage landscape planners can work with local communities to help them identify what they want to save—which is at once an intellectual and an emotional exercise—and how they can do it.

Strategies to protect heritage resources should consider the economic and social needs of local residents as well as the need to protect important traditions and associated landscape features. Planning and evaluation teams should include ethnographers and economic analysts as well as cultural geographers and historians. Examples of strategies that might be used to protect heritage values include

- design guidelines for new development and rehabilitation projects

- subsidies to make up the difference between a more affordable new way and a traditional old way of constructing facilities or doing business

- preservation of selected sites as parts of historic districts

Change imposed from the outside should be resisted. Change drawn from within should be directed given the heritage values emphasized—encourage self-sustaining stewardship.

John Jakle

Directing an area's "self-reflection" away from damaging parody will be a problem.

John Jakle

Proposed changes should go through a review process on the local level, to at least raise awareness. If the local community sees merit in preservation, change will be moderate. If they see a better future in change, they should be aware the de-certification is possible.

Tom Harvey

Monitoring and assessment could also be important from a more academic perspective. The process could tell us a great deal about landscape change over time.

Tom Harvey

The major contribution may be in terms of monitoring, education, interpretation, data gathering.

J. L. Sell

When a local community is aware of its heritage values and empowered to make informed choices, it can often sustain those values for many generations while still accommodating necessary changes. A larger threat to heritage landscapes is change imposed from the outside, for example, suburban residential growth into an area that has traditionally been a rural agricultural region. These pressures have the potential to change the complete context of the landscape, with the result that symbols from the past cease to have relevancy to the present. If that happens, the heritage values of the landscape will probably be lost.

Another threat to heritage landscapes is a loss of authenticity that can result from pandering to tourism. A wholesale shift in the economy from a traditional economic base to tourism or any attempts to fabricate "heritage" resources may turn the landscape into a parody. Technical assistance could help communities avoid this threat.

Some heritage landscapes—maybe 50 percent—will inevitably be lost within the foreseeable future. But just identifying and documenting them will have been a great service to future generations.

Because of the high potential for change it was suggested that heritage landscapes be designated for 20-year periods and that they be monitored every five years to ensure the timely detection of any threats. Redesignation every 20 years would encourage communities to evaluate the changes that had occurred over the past generation and renew their commitment to preserving their heritage.

AMERICAN HERITAGE LANDSCAPES:

THE NAME

A *cultural landscape* denotes an interaction of people with their environment. (No modern landscape, not even wilderness, is devoid of a human element and a conscious human decision about the form it should take.)

Landscape also denotes something visual and hopefully carries a message that how it looks is important. This does not mean that a landscape has to be aesthetically pleasing, but it should have visual integrity.

As stated above, people often equate a "landscape" with natural scenery, but landscapes can be any geographic region—urban or rural. Designating a national system of heritage landscapes including urban areas will help people understand the shared meanings of all landscapes.

Heritage denotes characteristics that have shaped the history of an area and the present generation's recognition of and attachment to those characteristics.

American implies that these heritage landscapes are of value to all Americans, that they are nationally significant.

~~Sawx~~
Boxley Valley